

Come, Lord Jesus!
Revelation 22:11-21
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“Louie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.” Do you know what movie that line ends? Of course, it’s “Casablanca,” which Leigh and I watched for the first time just a few weeks ago. That’s one of the most memorable movie endings of all time.

Can you think of others? How about Orson Welles whispering, “Rosebud” at the end of “Citizen Kane.” Or “Silence of the Lambs,” in which Anthony Hopkins as Hannibal “The Cannibal” Lecter, following a former nemesis of his, says, “I’m having an old friend for dinner.” I’m a big fan of the ending of “The Usual Suspects.” After the big twist is revealed, Keyser Soze says, “The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he did not exist. And like that...he is gone.”

But my favorite movie ending is probably “The Shawshank Redemption.” The movie, which is based on a Stephen King book, tells the story of Andy DuFresne and his imprisonment for murder. While in prison he meets Red, played by Morgan Freeman. Andy and Red strike up a friendship, and Red helps Andy with his escape attempt. At the very end of the movie, Red gets released from prison, and goes in search of Andy, filled with the hope that what he has been promised will come true. His last line is, “I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams. I hope.”

Hope also plays a role in the ending of another favorite work of mine. If I were to ask you the very first words of the Bible, I bet a majority of you would know, “In the beginning.” But if I were to ask you how the Bible ends, would be able to come up with it? “Amen” is a pretty good guess. “I guess that’s it” wouldn’t be as close. How *do* you end a book like the Bible?

The predominant theme of the ending of the Bible is stated right before the last line. That theme is “Come, Lord Jesus!” The Bible ends with a request, a plea, for Jesus to come again and make the world right, to end all pain and suffering and usher in the kingdom of God. These verses we read today bring to a close the book of Revelation, which uses very symbolic and disturbing imagery to paint a picture of what the end times will be like. Last year our Tuesday Bible Study focused on the book of Revelation, and after spending seven months with it I’m not sure I understand it any better than when we started. But I do know that it ends with the desire for Christ to come again.

It’s only appropriate that the Bible ends talking about the second coming of Jesus, because people haven’t stopped talking about it since. Jesus says, “No one knows the hour when I will return,” but that hasn’t discouraged people from speculating and prognosticating and marking their calendars for Jesus’ return. Obviously no one has been right yet, but that hasn’t stopped them from trying. I read this week about a pastor in Korea who talked thousands of his flock into believing that Christ was coming again on Oct. 28, 1992. His congregation made all kinds of preparations, including selling their possessions and giving the money to the church. When Oct. 28 came and went, folks grew suspicious, and the pastor was arrested for bilking over \$4 million dollars from his

congregation. The kicker is that he had invested a lot of the money in bonds that didn't mature until 1993!

I think part of the problem here is how much focus is put on the event instead of the process. What I mean by that is folks spend so much time talking about the second coming but don't talk about what we have to do as Christians to get ready. A great example of this is the "Left Behind" book series, which tell the authors' interpretation of the Rapture. The Rapture (a word not in the Bible, by the way) is the moment when all good believing Christians are swept up into Heaven by Jesus, leaving behind those unbelievers who must face a seven-year period of pain and suffering called the Tribulation. Leonard Sweet describes the Rapture as a Heavenly Hoover that sucks up believers into the Great Beyond.

The book series has been wildly popular and fueled lots of water-cooler talk about the Rapture and the Tribulation and a bunch of other end-time terms. Well, I've read Revelation, and it doesn't lay out a blueprint for what's going to happen. I wish it did. I wish I could give you a day and a time of the Rapture, and then a checklist of what you needed to do before it happened. "Walk old lady across street." Check. "Offer prayer at Board meeting." Check. "Put on clean underwear." Check. OK, I'm ready!

I have to think that the amount of energy expended figuring out how things are going to end is out of whack compared to the amount of time scripture spends on it. If the Christian life is merely about getting to Heaven, why is the Bible so thick? If all that matters is how things end, why do we have 66 books about loving our neighbors and carrying our crosses and keeping commandments? Is that busy work until the Heavenly Hoover arrives? The Bible doesn't end with "Come Lord Jesus" in order to give a time and date for Christ's return. Instead, I believe it's making a statement about preparation.

We don't know when Christ is coming again. During biblical times, they thought it would literally be any day. In fact, Paul has to tell some of the folks in the Thessalonian church to get off their duffs and get back to work, because they had dropped everything they were doing, thinking Jesus was coming any day. Paul writes to them, "Now brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write you, for you know very well that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." In other words, Paul didn't know when Jesus is coming, so what hope do we have?

We don't know, which accentuates our call to a constant state of preparedness. We are called to live our lives in such a way that we are ready for Christ's return, whether it's tomorrow or next week or in 2000 more years. The end of Revelation is an exhortation to live in such a way that helps usher in God's kingdom here on earth. As we strive to live lives of faith, to live out the words of these 66 books, we are preparing the way for the coming of Jesus into our world.

That means, as this passage says, we are to live like we are thirsty. Have you ever been really, really thirsty? Last year on our mission trip to New Orleans, I experienced real thirst. It was our first day on the worksite, and the temperature was easily in the mid-90s. We had on these Tyvek protective suits, respirators, work boots, hard hats, and plastic gloves. And about mid-afternoon, we ran out of water. We simply had not planned on drinking as much as we did. And we were *thirsty*. So our site supervisor and I made a frantic run to find water, while everyone else waited in the heat. We found some and brought it back to our crew. I was half-expecting to find little piles of dust where they had been standing. We filled everyone's jug and we drank like camels.

You know that moment when your thirst is most intense, that moment right before the glass hits your lips and the water pours into your mouth, that moment when you are so close to drinking you can almost taste it, and yet you're not quite there yet? That's how we are called to live. We are called to live as if the Living Water of Jesus Christ is so close to us we can taste it, and yet we're not quite there yet. We are called to live as if, at any moment, Christ might pour out his quenching spirit upon us. We don't know when that will be, but we're called to live as if it might be any moment. "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

So what does that look like? That's all well and good to talk about here on Sunday morning, but what does it mean to live a life of preparedness, especially when our anticipation may be dulled by 2000 years of waiting? How do you be expectant of something that you are not sure will happen in your lifetime? I believe this passage gives us a clue as to how we can do that. At the very beginning of what we read, Jesus says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." What this does is it establishes the authority of Jesus Christ as Lord. There was nothing before him and nothing after him. He is the A to Z in this world, and we should live as if he's the A to Z in our lives.

That means we live as if he is Lord, as if Jesus presides at the head of all we do. When we come to communion each week, we talk about Christ as the host of the meal, the one presiding at the head of the table. A life of preparedness means Jesus presides as Lord at the communion table and the dinner table, and worship and work, during prayer time and during play time. If Christ is the beginning and the end, then nothing we do and nowhere we go is outside of his realm. He is Lord of all, or he is Lord of nothing.

It may feel a bit strange to talk about the end times and the rapture and such. I'll admit that I'm not quite sure what it all means. But I do know this: I want to be prepared. I want to live as if Jesus is watching, when others are around and when no one is around. I want to live a life that testifies to the fact that the Lord of my life is Jesus, not money or work or possessions. I want to be ready. I want to live like Red, with hope that what I've been promised will come true.

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen, Come Lord Jesus!